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SUBJECT: VISIT HIGHLIGHTS US ASSISTANCE TO SANTA MARTA

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: The DCM traveled on February 18 and 19 to the Port of Santa Marta (in the Caribbean coast department of Magdalena) to meet with local political, social, and business leaders and to visit the Santa Marta Port, La Remonta Antinarcotics Police Base, a USAID-funded clinic and school, and Drummond's coal shipping port. The visit highlighted U.S. assistance efforts to counter the trade in narcotics and improve the quality of life for vulnerable groups, and the improving business and infrastructure environment for the local economy. END SUMMARY.

PROFAMILIA CLINIC VISIT HIGHLIGHTS HELP TO VULNERABLE GROUPS

¶12. (U) The Deputy Chief of Mission, accompanied by the Economic Counselor, as well as NAS and CONS officers visited the port city of Santa Marta, Magdalena on February 18-19. Profamilia Director Maria Isabel Plata led DCM on a tour of the clinic's waiting rooms and consultation and medical offices. Plata said the clinic sees 20-25 patients a day, typically youth, displaced persons, and the elderly.

¶13. (U) Teenage pregnancies are a problem in Colombia, Plata said. Their pregnancy rate climbed from 10 percent in 1990 to 21 percent today - largely due to earlier sex, looser norms, violence, and less emphasis on protection. In a subsequent discussion with 25 local community beneficiaries and Profamilia management, teenagers said Profamilia prepares them for the future by providing planning and orientation sessions. Training to avoid early pregnancies is particularly helpful, as child parents find it particularly hard to continue their education. Displaced beneficiaries said Profamilia provides training on sexual education, how to identify and avoid mistreatment, and the use of condoms. This training has positively impacted the quality of life of 135 displaced persons and 250 families, they added.

¶14. (U) All participants thanked Embassy officers for U.S. support to Profamilia's programs, which they hoped would continue. To date, USAID has provided USD 22.2 million from 2000-2009, which has supported over 600,000 beneficiaries in 23 Departments and 169 municipalities. Community members said additional funding for a new cultural center would be helpful to provide a meeting place and to keep youth off the streets.

SANTA MARTA PORT SECURITY PROGRAM SHOWS SUCCESS

¶15. (SBU) At the Santa Marta Port, Major Alexander Sanchez, DIRAN Port Commander, led the DCM on a security program tour. The Antinarcotics Police, Sanchez explained, have 42 officers and six dogs stationed at the port. They inspect loaded and empty containers for drugs, certifying and tagging those that pass the visual, canine and equipment inspection process. The police also use boats to patrol the loading area to ensure narcotics are not manually loaded onto ships from the water, Sanchez added.

¶6. (U) The Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS), DHS, and DEA provide equipment, canine support, and training to the Antinarcotics Police, who continually have to improve procedures to keep pace with changing tactics employed by drug traffickers. In 2008, the Antinarcotics police based in Santa Marta Port seized over 1,000 kilos of cocaine.

SANTA MARTA ANTINARCOTICS SEIZURES UP 100 PERCENT OVER 2007

¶7. (SBU) Lieutenant Colonel Hector Montenegro Montenegro, Zone Commander, Antinarcotics Northern Zone, provided Embassy officers with a tour and briefing at the Colombian National Police's La Remonta base. His 142-person counternarcotics special forces (Jungla) company and ten Bell helicopters cover 33 percent of the country, Montenegro said, and seizures have risen 100 percent over ¶2007. Montenegro provided a visual demonstration of the Jungla company's men and equipment; the elite force has less than 700 members in the country and is a model for other countries implementing antinarcotics operations. DCM Nichols visited demonstration marijuana and cocaine processing facilities to gain an understanding of the growing, processing, and refining methods of drug traffickers. Montenegro demonstrated the approaches and risks undertaken by the Junglas in their efforts to seize, destroy, and interdict drug operations. He said the company uses human intelligence to identify cocaine processing labs, and has to operate quickly to destroy them before guerilla or drug organizations mount counter-attacks from nearby bases. Even without a drug seizure, the destruction of a lab can mean a loss of more than USD 500,000 to these organizations, Montenegro added.

¶8. (U) The DCM also toured barracks donated the U.S., the helicopter hangar and maintenance shop, and saw policemen constructing a laundry and gym using materials donated by NAS. To date, NAS has donated USD 7.6 million for facilities and perimeter security measures at La Remonta.

DCM INAUGURATES THE KEARSARGE SCHOOL

¶9. (U) The original Los Alpes school was destroyed by fire in December 2007, leaving 100 children without classrooms. In September 2008, the US Navy ship USS Kearsarge arrived in Santa Marta on a Humanitarian Civic Assistance mission. This included rebuilding the school, which was finished by USAID through PADF at a cost of approximately USD 74,000.

¶10. (U) At the Kearsarge School in Los Alpes, the DCM offered remarks regarding the importance of education to Santa Marta's First Lady Mara Teresa Espinosa de Daz Granados, School Director Alfonso Polo, Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) Deputy Director William Greenwood and school children, staff, and community members. The DCM then inaugurated the newly rebuilt school with a ribbon cutting ceremony and plaque unveiling, after which Polo presented a four minute video on how the school was rebuilt with U.S. Navy and USAID assistance. Polo also provided a tour of the school and its four 25-student classrooms and kitchen.

DRUMMOND COAL GROWS EXPORTS

¶11. (SBU) Drummond Vice President Gary Norman highlighted Drummond's environmental and coal-field restoration programs and discussed Drummond operations and plans, during a luncheon and tour of the facility. Since 1996, Drummond has invested USD 1 billion and increased production from 8 million tons to 22 million tons in 2008, expecting production to reach 25 million tons in 2009. Norman noted Drummond transportation -- responsible for moving coal 192km from the mine to the port -- has 1,000 direct and 4,500 indirect employees and 35 locomotives and 1,500 gondolas, while Drummond mining has 3,000 direct and 5,000 indirect employees. Norman said that at upon his arrival in 2003, Drummond coal transport trains were attacked weekly; however, cooperation with the military, President's office, and the improving security situation has resulted in no attacks since 2004.

¶12. (SBU) Norman said Drummond's port occupies 310 hectares on land and 5,000 acres on water, and recent port investments had increased capacity from 28 million tons to 30 million tons per year. The GOC

has issued a resolution requiring Drummond to direct load coal onto ships (as opposed to their current practice of barge loading), but that Drummond would counter by offering to direct load 75 percent and barge load 25 percent. Norman explained that the cost and environmental consequences of dredging to allow full direct loading would be significant, and that it would take three years to phase out the barge loading cranes in any case.

¶13. (SBU) The port expansion and increased production would require Drummond to add a rail line from its mine to the port, Norman said. This project was delayed for 16 months, as Drummond found residences on the right of way and was also negotiating with the GOC for parts of the line that were outside its permit. Drummond has partially solved this issue by dividing the line into three parts, operating the second line in the northern and southern sections pending resolution of the middle line. Norman said he expected the sections to be finished at the end of 2009, when rail capacity would grow from 45,000 to 60,000 tons per day.

¶14. (U) Drummond plans to expand production significantly with the opening of its new El Descanso field, targeted to start production in 2009. This field would enable Drummond to eventually increase annual production to 40 million tons per year. The expansion, Norman added, should increase employment by 2.3 percent in mining and 1.8 percent in transportation this year alone. Norman said price fluctuations should not be a factor in their expansion plans, as Drummond is profitable with world prices at USD 35 per ton (the current price is USD 65). Drummond also has premium coal, with a sulfur content of 0.37 percent vs. the 0.57 percent average, leading to high demand from its EU and U.S. customers.

¶15. (U) Colombia is already the world's fifth largest coal exporter, exporting a total of 67.2 million tons in 2008. Alabama-based Drummond sources all of its non-U.S. coal in Colombia, and accounts for one-third of Colombian coal exports. In large part due to Drummond's expansion plans, Colombia could become the third largest exporter by 2012.

POSITIVE PRESS COVERAGE AND RESULTS

¶16. (U) Local and national press interviewed the DCM at both the Profamilia Health Clinic and Kearsarge School, including El Informador, El Tiempo Caribe, Diario del Magdalena, Radio Universidad del Magdalena, Radio Galeon, Caracol Radio, and Noticiero Televisa. DCM Nichols highlighted these events as good examples of bilateral cooperation, and how the USG is helping Colombia's vulnerable groups and poor live better lives. Positive placement included the following print articles: February 20 article in El Informador (Circulation: 7,500) entitled "Children from Los Alpes school fulfilled their dream of having a school"; February 20 article in Diario del Magdalena (Circulation: 55,900); February 20 article in el Informador (Circulation: 7,500) entitled: "Education is the path to a better world: Brian Nichols"; and February 19 brief in El Tiempo Caribe (Circulation: 9,900) entitled: "US Embassy supports programs for vulnerable population".

At Drummond, VP Norman agreed to DCM Nichols' request to use their construction equipment to improve the access road to the Los Alpes community and its Kearsarge School.

BROWNFIELD